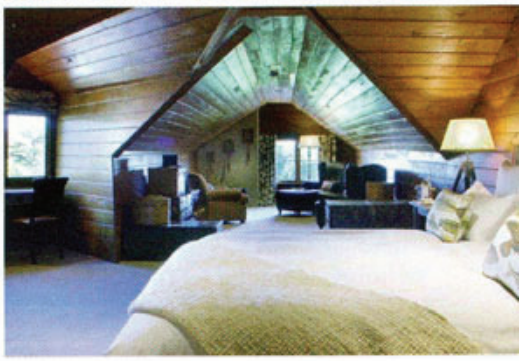
New Zealand:
The Ultimate Soft Adventure

This absurdly scenic, two-island nation offers **thrill-seeking newlyweds** everything imaginable: award-winning accommodations, abundant outdoor activities, fabulous food and wine, zany extreme sports. Read on for our favorite don't-miss experiences.



Kiwi comforts *Opposite:* Lake Wanaka is a magnet for thrill-seekers. *This page, clockwise from left:* The terrace at The Farm at Cape Kidnappers serves up stellar views. Old Saint Mary's Convent in Blenheim is now a B&B. Otahuna Lodge has seven artfully restored rooms.

LAVISH LODGES

Stay at any of these properties to experience the best of the country's nature-and-nurture lifestyle.

❶ The Farm at Cape Kidnappers Set on 6,000 rolling acres atop a scenic promontory 30 minutes from the Art Deco city of Napier, this tasteful and secluded North Island property offers eye-popping views and all the pampering you could possibly want. Paradoxically both an upscale lodge and a working sheep and cattle station, its elegant-chic farmhouse decor invites instant relaxation in 26 rooms and suites. By day, go seabird-watching at the onsite gannet colony (the world's largest and most accessible) or river kayaking on the superscenic Tukituki. Back at the farm, luxuriate with the spa's Casa de Lavenda massage, then plop on a pillow in the round-roofed Snug lounge with glasses of merlot from one of nearby Hawke's Bay's vineyards before savoring the chef's tempting dégustation menu and retiring to your sumptuous suite (doubles from $607, including breakfast and dinner; capekidnappers.com). —*Stephanie Stephens*

❷ Bay of Many Coves Resort Tucked into a cozy section of the South Island's Marlborough Sounds, this luxe 11-room eco-resort is a testament to what a nature-oriented escape should be. It is the kind of place where you wake up to cormorants madly flapping their wings across the water's surface in early morning takeoffs. Modern cedar and copper buildings contain one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, all featuring designer fabrics and a large deck. The lodge is an ideal locale for exploring the sound: Hop into a kayak and picnic at a nearby bay, or opt for a spin on one of the resort's private yachts. Then return home to sip glasses of sauvignon blanc on the porch as dolphins slip through the water. End the day at Mākoha spa with a Miri Miri healing massage, incorporating avocado, apricot and native lavender oils (apartments from $261; bayofmanycovesresort.co.nz). —*Nicole Alper*

❸ Otahuna Lodge The drive to this 30-acre estate along a serpentine path, with sheep dotting the foothills, sets a high level of expectation—and the reward at the end doesn't disappoint. An elegant Queen Anne gem built in 1895 outside Christchurch on the South Island, Otahuna is the dream of new owners, Hall Cannon and Miles Refo, who oversaw a meticulous refurbishment of the seven-suite lodge in 2007. You'll be invited to sit in the drawing room and sip New Zealand vintages or stroll the orange blossom–scented Dutch Garden. Dinnertime feels plucked straight from a Jane Austen novel, as you're ushered into a kauri wood–paneled dining room to feast on a five-course meal—think pan-roasted Tai Tapu duck confit with Otahuna spring vegetables and a sage and hazelnut pesto—whipped up by executive chef Jimmy McIntyre. Book the Verandah Master Suite, where you can soak in a tub next to a crackling fire, or sit on the porch for a prime view as helicopters whisk guests on a whirlwind spin across the Southern Alps (doubles from $523, including breakfast and dinner; otahuna.co.nz). —*N.A.*

❹ Whare Kea Lodge & Chalet What was built as a private home for an Australian department store mogul is today an intimate six-room retreat on the South Island's stunning Lake Wanaka—an hour from extreme sports central Queenstown. Start your morning with *(continued on page 351)*

(continued from page 339) a "flat white" (coffee with milk) while looking out over the Southern Alps in the all-window living room, which, with light streaming in, feels like a homey greenhouse. It's also the ideal spot to watch the changing weather; during my stay, the lake morphed from something out of *On Golden Pond* to *The Perfect Storm*. When the sun sets, a fireplace kicks into action. The two largest suites offer king-sized beds and bathtubs with gorgeous mountain views. At night you'll discover Whare Kea's true highlight: a four-course meal prepared by chef James Stapley. Dishes such as slow-roasted Waitaki pork belly with parsnip purée and snow peas just keep coming. Work off the calories with a hike to nearby Rob Roy Glacier (doubles from $575, including breakfast and dinner; wharekealodge.com). —*N.A.*

ADVENTURE OUTPOSTS

The South Island, renowned for its scenery, is the spot to sample New Zealand's favorite outdoor pursuits.

5 Queen Charlotte Track Every New Zealand visit should include a good "tramp" (that's Kiwi for walking), and there's no better place to do it than Marlborough Sounds' 44-mile Queen Charlotte Track, a vast network of drowned river valleys put on the map by Captain James Cook in the late 1600s. Sign up with Wilderness Guides, which organizes multiday outings; honeymooners seeking a bit of pampering will love the 4-Day Gourmet Kayak and Walk, which includes days of hiking in lush coastal beech forest and sea kayaking past playful Dusky dolphins, then overnighting at boutique inns. These include Punga Cove Resort (punga cove.co.nz), featuring hillside chalets with views of Endeavour Inlet, and the No Road Inn, which offers claw-foot bathtubs with circular picture windows looking out onto the trees (no roadinn.com). You'll store up energy by dining on Marlborough king salmon filet and New Zealand rack of lamb topped off with some of the region's best wines, before heading out on another day of tramping (from $1,358 for two, including three nights' lodging, all meals, kayaks and transfers; wildernessguidesnz.com). —*N.A.*

6 Franz Josef Glacier For some, gawking at the world's steepest and fastest-flowing commercially guided glacier raises the inevitable question: Can I climb it? Sure you can! With Franz Josef Glacier Guides, you'll trudge over river rocks and up the ice, thanks to crampons on your boot bottoms and hand ropes anchored along man-made stairs (from $102 for two; franz josefglacier.com). Take it to the next level with an ice-climbing lesson at Hukawai Glacier Centre, where you'll be fitted with sharper crampons, picks, jackets and helmets, then enter the climate-controlled chamber and negotiate the 30-foot frozen wall (from $64 for two; hukawai.co.nz). Best of all, later you can chill out in the 12-room Franz Josef Glacier Country Retreat. Our pick: the Wallace Room, with its four-poster bed and claw-foot tub (doubles from $176, including breakfast; glacier-retreat.co.nz). —*S.S.*

7 Rough and Tumble Bush Lodge Rough it's not, so tumble into this five-room abode on the northern West Coast, shaded by the Mt. Glasgow ranges and set on the mighty Mokihinui River (Rough and Tumble is the name of a tributary). "Go deep" with effervescent owners Marion "Weasel" Boatwright from North Carolina and his Kiwi wife, chef Susan Cook, by tramping perfect walkways or nearly empty beaches, kayaking, mountain biking or panning for gold. Return to the lodge for Susan's gourmet offerings, such as Akaroa salmon and herbed risotto with asparagus. After dinner, enjoy a private alfresco Full Bliss Bush Bath (doubles from $214, including meals and activities; roughandtumble.co.nz). —*S.S.*

8 Wilderness Lodge Lake Moeraki If you're driving from Nelson to Queenstown on State Highway 6, overnight at the obvious choice, owned by an ecologist husband-and-wife team. Stay adjacent to the glacier-carved Lake Moeraki—the Maori word means a place to sleep or dream by day—in an uninhabited valley surrounded by rainforests and six miles of trails best enjoyed with a nature guide who'll instruct you on feeding the local eels. On the rocky Tasman Sea shoreline, hang out with fur seals, giant elephant seals and the world's rarest penguin: the Fiordland Crested. Book one of the four Riverview suites with spa bath and private deck (doubles from $309, including breakfast and dinner; wildernesslodge.co.nz). —*S.S.*

FOODIE FAVORITES

Prepare your taste buds for a 24/7 treat as the Kiwi culinary scene grows more awesome year after year.

9 Taste Canterbury Tours Honeymooners staying at Otahuna Lodge and hungry to sample the best of the South Island's Canterbury region—six distinct areas from Waipara to Christchurch and Akaroa to the Banks Peninsula—can hook up with local

food authority Mavis Airey for a whirlwind half- or full-day culinary adventure. Airey will take you to boutique cheese makers, salmon fisheries, wineries, microbreweries, single-flower honey farms, chocolatiers and tea houses ($149 for a half day; $256 for a full day, with vineyard lunch for two; www.goodthings.co.nz). —*N.A.*

⑩ Central Otago Wineries This swath of the South Island ringed by mountains and interlaced with lakes and deep river gorges may be young, but it is producing some of the world's best vintages. Case in point: Wooing Tree Vineyard is now luring wine aficionados eager for a taste of its pinot noirs, particularly the 2006 vintage (wooingtree.co.nz). Down the road, another must-sip is Bald Hills, set on a former sheep station near the old gold-mining town of Bannockburn, and run by Blair and Estelle Hunt. If you're lucky, they might pour you a special vintage, such as their 2005 pinot noir (baldhills.co.nz). Stop for lunch at restored farmhouse restaurant, The Winehouse & Kitchen, owned by Henry van Asch, who went from pushing clients off bridges (he and AJ Hackett invented bungee jumping) to running one of the area's best winery restaurants. Order the Pinot Noir Platter, chock-full of wine-braised duck, with a bottle of 2006 van Asch Central Otago pinot noir (lunch, $45 for two; winehouse.co.nz). —*N.A.*

⑪ Picton-Blenheim Anyone traveling by ferry between the North and South islands passes through sleepy waterside Picton, now in the midst of a face-lift. The Yacht Club Hotel is a perfect example: It has gone from a dilapidated motel to a modern property with a new restaurant, The Chartroom (dinner, $84 for two; the yachtclub.co.nz). Picton's other draw is the nearby town of Blenheim, a gourmet haven of restaurants and boutique hotels near 100-plus vineyards. At 60-acre Old Saint Mary's Convent, you'll feel as if you've died and gone to heaven in the stunning Chapel Suite, with stained-glass windows and vineyard views ($400; convent.co.nz). Another must-visit is Herzog Winery, Restaurant & Inn, owned by Hans and Therese Herzog, who brought their Michelin-star eatery from Switzerland to Blenheim. Check into their Vineyard Cottage, before feasting on Marlborough crayfish with confit of lemons (three-course dinner, $102 for two; cottage, exclusive to restaurant guests, $203; herzog.co.nz). —*N.A.*

⑫ Helicopter to Pegasus Winery The South Island's snow-covered peaks and lush vineyards beg for aerial viewing. Christchurch-based Garden City Helicopters (helicopters.net.nz) offers two-hour flights across the Canterbury plains and through the Waimakariri River Gorge. Your birdie will park on a peak before continuing west to Arthur's Pass National Park and on to the Waipara wine region to touch down at Pegasus Bay Winery (pegasusbay.com) for lunch. Two massive wine-bottle chandeliers preside over the restaurant as you sip stellar pinot noirs and rieslings. Order the Tasting Platter, piled high with buffalo mozzarella, breadsticks, olives, farmhouse pâté and salmon (lunch, $40 for two; helicopter, $834 for two). —*N.A.*

ONLY-IN-NZ ODDITIES

Bungee jumping and zorbing have gone global, but some things remain a strictly South Island experience.

⑬ Go Glowworm Caving New Zealand's favorite cave dweller, the glowworm, is actually a member of the gnat family. The critter's bioluminescence is created by a chemical reaction that attracts both the opposite sex and prey. Near Westport, caving pros Norwest Adventures Ltd. supply wetsuits, life jackets, headlamp-lit helmets and confidence to curious tourists. All are required for maneuvering through narrow passages and cavernous spaces. Helmet lights switched off, cavers plop into inner tubes and float into a blackness lit only by countless starry glowworms. When they emerge into sunlight, they spin down a gentle river rapid and proclaim, "There's nothing else like this!" ($155 for two; caverafting.com). —*S.S.*

⑭ Find the French Accent If you're craving a touch of Europe, take a day trip from Christchurch to Akaroa. The town's pier, offering trips to swim with Hector's dolphins (the world's smallest), smacks of the South Island. But look more closely—is that street sign in French?—and you'll notice that this former French settlement is far more *oui* than Kiwi. Also noteworthy is Akaroa's electric-blue-haired artist Josie Martin, owner of The Giants House. Located up a hill, this fortress of whimsy is a kind of mixed media museum with a sculpture garden and a B&B, where you can sleep in the Rose Room, overlooking a universe of colored tile and glass (doubles from $186; linton.co.nz). —*N.A.*

⑮ Get On Yer Bike! Omnipresent quad bikes (ATVs) are a must-have on large farms. Quads morph from utilitarian workhorses to recreational vehicles that deliver adventure at On Yer Bike!, in Greymouth. For muddy good fun, bikers can make it "grub-bier" by suiting up in foul-weather gear to plow their quads straight through rivers, small ponds and gooey brown soil. Another option: Let the owners navigate the amphibious 8WD Argo or the massive Hagglund truck for an extreme all-terrain drive (from $54 for two; onyerbike.co.nz). —*S.S.*

⑯ Save a Gecko There's something special about a lodge that has committed itself to preserving a tiny local lizard. The Marlborough green gecko is just one of the endangered critters Lochmara Lodge owners Shayne Olsen and Louise Bright are eager to save. A magical place ruled as much by the owners' imaginations as by their consciences, it's a wacky mishmash of wildlife recovery and artsy mayhem—think *Animal Planet* meets *Alice in Wonderland*. Don't miss Glowworm Gully, an outdoor "theater" of glowing creatures, and the 11-acre "living gallery" filled with art, including a *Lord of the Rings*–style path of trees with faces carved in their trunks (doubles from $101; lochmaralodge.co.nz). —*N.A.*

For more info, 866/NEW-ZEALAND or newzealand.com